

INFLUENCE OF PENTECOSTALISM IN THE MAINLINE CHURCHES IN NIGERIA, 1970-2015

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ABSTRACT

Pentecostalism is no longer a Pentecostals' affairs only, but the mainstream Christians experience as well. Pentecostal life is now evident in the lives of Christians of all persuasions within the Nigerian religious firmament. The Pentecostalization of the mainline churches in Nigeria is made possible through Pentecostals' contagious influence on the mainliners through their flexible theology and spirituality. This paper is crafted using phenomenological and analytical approaches. The findings show that Pentecostalism even though introduced some negative tendencies among Christians, but has helped in reawakening Christians' enthusiasm in spiritual matters. The paper submits that for maximum understanding and benefits of Pentecostalism, critics of Pentecostalism should as a matter of priority study the essence, efficacy and workability of Pentecostalism.

KEYWORDS: Pentecostalism, Pentecostals, Christians, Church, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The Pentecostals are multiplying in contemporary Nigeria. They are steadily exerting a great deal of influence on a large number of Christians across the broad section of the Christian faith. As an urban socio-religious phenomenon, Pentecostalism is gradually spreading its tentacle to the rural areas in Nigeria and appears to be a force to be reckoned with around the world. Currently, it is making great waves in the mainstream protestant churches in Nigeria. According to Achunike & Kitause (2014) "The strength of Pentecostalism seems to lie in its theology and ethics. It is probably in the core belief system and spirituality of the Pentecostals that the Pentecostals are bringing their influence to bear in the society" (p.1).

Today, the Pentecostals abound in their millions and their presence are being felt everywhere in the globe. How the Pentecostals impinge on the mainline churches forms the main thesis of this paper. The paper seeks to unearth the underlying factors responsible for the sudden upsurge of Pentecostalism in the mainline churches in Nigeria using the Anglican, the Methodist and the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) Churches as a case study. It begins by tracing the root of Charismatic movements in Nigeria.

Emergence of Charismatism in Nigeria

Charismatism is perceived as Pentecostalism in the mainline churches (Achunike, 2004). Its modern origin is traceable to the worldwide spread of Pentecostalism in the USA in the 1900s (Hinnells, 1995). In Nigeria, the Charismatic movements were first noticed among college students and university graduates in the early 1970s (Ojo, 1988). These groups emphasize the Pentecostal doctrines of baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues as a means of revitalising the lives of Christians and restoring vitality to Christian churches.

Among the early fruits of these movements were the establishment in 1971 of Charismatic organizations such as World Action Team for Christ (WATC), Ambassadors Evangelistic Team (AET) and the Youth Evangelistic Movement (YEM). This was followed in 1973 with the founding of Deeper Christian Life Ministry (DCLM), the Maranatha Evangelical Christian Ministry (MECM) and the Christian Fellowship Group (CFG) by W. F. Kumuyi, Biola Adeniran and Segun Tubi respectively. In the course of time, an unidentified flare like Benson Andrew Idahosa(1938-1998) who just started to “happen” came into the scene and was preceded by others in the 1980s and 1990s (Achunike, 2004). Idahosa eventually popularized Pentecostalism in Nigeria through his prosperity preaching along with people of like minds.

At this time, Pentecostalism became pervasive and metamorphosed into different forms with different names. In the Catholic Church, it is called Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Nigeria (CCRN). In the Anglican Communion, it is known by the name Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion (EFAC). It operates as Methodist Evangelical Movement (MEM) in the Methodist Church. Names like Presbyterian Young Peoples Association of Nigeria (PYPAN) and the ECWA Youth Fellowship (EYF) respectively were used in the Presbyterian and ECWA Churches (H. Wisdom, personal communication, April 13, 2015).

The spread of these movements in Nigeria has been attributed to many factors especially their doctrinal emphasis coupled with their warmth, free and spontaneous worship services. It is said that the Charismatic movements offered Nigerians avenues for expressing the Christian faith in a more meaningful manner relevant to the condition and circumstances of Nigerians (Ojo, 2006). In this way Pentecostalism makes itself very attractive to Christian of other persuasions. The Charismatic movements are interdenominational in nature while the Pentecostal movement is distinctly denominational. The paper attempts to make distinction between Pentecostal, neo Pentecostal and charismatic for a better understanding of the terms.

Clarification on Basic Terminologies

The term ‘Pentecostal’ and ‘Charismatic’ are often used interchangeably because they have many things in common. Different scholars have attempted to clarify their exact meanings. Johnstone and Mandryk (2001) think that the word ‘Pentecostals’ should refer to “Those affiliated to specifically Pentecostal denominations committed to a Pentecostal theology, usually a post-conversion experience of a baptism in the Spirit” (p.3). Vinson (1975) in Inyama (2007)’s perspective is that:

Charismatics are those persons in the mainline denominations who have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit and have chosen to stay within their own churches or find fellowship in non denominational bodies rather than to join the organized Pentecostal denominations (Inyama, 2007, p.22).

The neo Pentecostals are those Christians that have experienced the baptism with the Holy Spirit and operate as independent Pentecostal church other than the Classical Pentecostals.

Pentecostalization of the Mainline Churches in Nigeria

Pentecostalization was first coined by Gyadu (2005, p.30) in an attempt to describe the survival strategy of the mainline churches at the time when they were experiencing massive defection of mainstream Christians to the Pentecostal churches. The reason for such exodus in the perspective of the defectors was to find spiritual nourishment from Pentecostal churches. This makes the mainline churches to mellow down to accommodate Pentecostal practices. This was an effort to create an enabling environment for the departing members to stay back in the Church. This strategy is what Gyadu called the ‘Pentecostalization’ of the mainline churches.

Anderson (2000) calls this Pentecostalization “African Reformation”. It is established that African Pentecostal churches were not only reforming the mainline churches, but also bringing restoration. The Pentecostals have influenced virtually everything around them. Their influence in the society has assumed a wider dimension in the 21st century. The Nigerian society is currently replete with Pentecostal activities.

Dimension of Pentecostals’ Influence on the Mainstream Protestant Churches

In identifying areas of influence of Pentecostalism in the mainline churches, this paper finds the work of Achunike (2004), Ukpong (2010) and a host of others very important. This helps to determine the degree of Pentecostalization in the Anglican, the Methodist and the ECWA churches in the present Nigeria. It reveals the extent to which Pentecostalism has succeeded in influencing the mainline churches in Nigeria. According to Achunike (2004), the fulcrums of any church worth its salt are located in its polity, doctrine, ethics and liturgy. These four cardinal features which characterized any church help to unravel how the Pentecostals have been influencing the mainline churches’ style of prayer, preaching, healing, liturgy and choruses (Achunike, 2002).

In his studies too, Ukpong (2010) spotlights twelve positive and six negative influences of Pentecostalism on churches in Nigeria. This assists in determining Pentecostals’ major areas of influence on the mainstream protestant churches earmarked for this study. This paper identifies and discusses the under listed areas of influence in these churches. It is therefore apt to ask: How do the Pentecostals influence these churches at the level of liturgy, preaching, ethics and healing among others?

Pentecostals Influence on Liturgy

It is no exaggeration that the Charismatics have made in-roads into the mainline churches. The Pentecostals’ lively ways of praying and worshipping God is now commonplace in the Anglican, Methodist and ECWA churches in Nigeria. Worship in these churches has taken a new dimension. Their usual cold, dull and stereotyped kind of worship is gradually giving way to vibrancy. The Pentecostals seem to have injected life into the worship services of these churches. Songs sung during worship in these churches are chiefly Pentecostal in tune. People seem to embrace the Pentecostal style of worship for its warmth and liveliness.

According to Enang (2012), “Pentecostals demonstrate overflowing enthusiasm in matters of worship. They shout, scream, roll around on the floor, dance and play deafening musical instruments. During such services, predictions, speaking in tongues and prophecies are alleged to occur” (p.265). Concurring with the above assertion, Obi (2014) avers that “Services in the Pentecostal churches are never predictable. Anything can happen. Their liturgy is not rigid but fluid and flexible” (p.15). Today, one hardly notices any difference between the mainline churches worship services and the Pentecostal churches worship services.

Preaching

Preaching, says Obasanjo (2009) is proclaiming but it is public proclamation. Preaching is carried out to communicate the word of God to the people in the power of the Holy Spirit (Ukpong, 2008). Preaching is a widely recognized phenomenon both in the mainline and Pentecostal churches (Enang, 2012). In Christendom, preaching is to be done in a way that makes the message understandable for quick results. This is either for the salvation of the people or for meeting their personal spiritual nourishment and needs. The Pentecostals preach with an amount of seriousness and gusto to convince their audience. Their preaching probably contains solutions to people’s problem of sickness, insecurity, fear, poverty and the like. This makes Pentecostals homily very attractive to Nigerians. Most of the mainline churches have

followed suit in making their messages to count too. Most of the mainline preachers have imitated Pentecostal ways of preaching.

Ethics and Prayer Life

The Pentecostals are known for their strict lifestyles. They seem to order their lives in line with biblical teachings. According to Achunike (2004), “The Charismatics tend to be “puritanic” in their ethics. They fast on occasions. They do not dress in seductive or sensual or frivolous manner. Girls and women do not apply lipsticks or eye shadows or wear transparent clothes” (p.65). This is true especially of the early Classical Pentecostals in Nigeria. As a result of this, the Pentecostals have influenced the mainstream Christians’ spirituality.

Music/Choruses

Pentecostal or Charismatic liturgy usually begins with singing praises. This goes side by side with handclapping and drumming. Praise is seen as an appropriate response to God for the life people live and the multiple blessings people enjoy. Songs, hymns and powerful worship have become a known feature of Christianity in Nigeria. Praise involves noise-making, shouting, singing, drumming, handclapping and dancing. The Pentecostals praise God spontaneously with songs. According to Achunike (2004), “Songs are in themselves a lively and joyous thing. Songs have a universal language which appeals to human beings. Songs warm up the environment” (p.73). This probably is the reason why most evangelism teams of the mainline churches popularly known as “New Life For All” always displayed vibrancy in their outing with drumming, singing, and dancing as they go out to preach.

Devotional Practices

The Pentecostals tend to challenge the nominal Christians through their unreserved devotion to God. They prefer to deepen their rapport and acquaintance with God day by day. This, they do by regular fasting and praying to achieve some depth of faith. Prayer is a major mark of the Pentecostals. Prayer showcases ones’ personal bond with God. Members of the mainline churches are becoming more enlightened of the roles prayer plays in their individual and corporate life. Influenced by the Pentecostals, most mainstream Christians seem to read their Bibles more often and pray and speak in tongues a great deal for personal edification. Ukpong (2010) affirms that “Members of the mainline churches are incorporating from the Pentecostals new religious practices devotions that seem to respond pragmatically to their religious and spiritual necessities” (p.37).

Prosperity Preaching

It is said that tithe payment is the staple diet of the Pentecostals (Achunike, 2004). Tithing is Biblical and has been upheld in Christendom for supporting the priests and probably the Church. The biblical practice of tithing is gaining ground among Christians globally. The Pentecostals are aware of tithing and are practising it zealously. They have been taught that financial prosperity comes as a result of one’s giving. Giving seems to be the main emphasis in Pentecostal prosperity preaching (Adelaja, 2009). Hence, overdue stress on giving is a common practice of prosperity preachers in Nigeria.

This leads to the accumulation of material wealth by the Nigerian prosperity preachers (Gbile, 2011). According to Anderson (2004), many Pentecostal pastors are easily identifiable by their flamboyant and lavish lifestyle. Prosperity preaching has stealthily crept into the mainline churches in Nigeria (Ibenwa, 2012).

Lay Participation

Pentecostal polity is expanded to accommodate all and give space to anyone who freely wishes to exercise the gift of the Spirit (Achunike, 2004). In the Pentecostal circles, there is the awareness that there is one Spirit but many gifts (1Cor. 12:8-13). There are different ministries where people fit in and are encouraged to demonstrate their God-given talents. This makes lay people to become more involved in church programmes so as to put such gifts to use. It is not matter of the leader-do-it-all but all participate in ministering to the need of the brethren. The mainline churches have been sensitized due to the influence of the Charismatics and are involving lay people to minister in the Church. Even some of the mainline churches like the Presbyterian and the Methodist churches have started ordaining women as priests as do the Pentecostal churches.

Use of Mass Media

The mainline churches are beginning to optimally utilize the mass media to advertise their programmes. Some of their ministers buy air time and feature regularly in the television. This enables them to reach a wider audience with the Gospel. By this, the mainline pastors maximise the use of the electronic media to increase their fame and those of their churches in same way Pentecostal churches have been doing. In Nigeria, Benson Andrew Idahosa, a Pentecostal pastor started it and has probably influenced the mainline pastors too.

Aesthetic of Religious Ambience

The Pentecostals have succeeded in influencing generally the aesthetic designs of religious buildings in Nigeria. It is undisputable that the most beautiful edifices in Nigeria are houses of worship. Achunike (2004) avers that the Pentecostals have a very high sense of aesthetic. This is evident in the architectural beauty of their churches and their interior decorations. Beautification of churches has become the order of the day in Nigeria. This is not out of place since God himself is an embodiment of beauty. The Pentecostals are commended for this. Most mainline churches are being renovated and decorated to braced up to the challenge in Nigeria.

Negative Influence of Pentecostalism on the Mainline Churches

Pentecostalism has not only impacted the mainline churches positively, but it has equally wrecked some havoc on the mainline churches in Nigeria. Some of these negative impacts include the following:

Healing, Deliverance and Prophecy

A great majority of people are in jeopardy of their health. Health is always desired and sought for by all those who have such health challenges (Beyer, 1997). Anywhere possible solutions could be found, people tend to flock there. In their searching for solutions, people have exposed themselves to all sorts of hazard and bizarre practices. The Charismatics have always believed in and practiced faith healing. In their efforts to administer healing to the sick, some Pentecostals tend to abuse it and engage in undesirable behaviours. Some of them contract prayer deal with their clients for cash exchange and have become rich at the expense of those handicapped people in the society without providing solutions to their problems. This has contributed in making many people to experience a kind of crisis in their faith.

Prayer

Prayer is a major hallmark of the Pentecostals (Gwamna, 2012). According to Mbiti (1975), prayers, more than any other aspect of religion, contain the most intense expression of African traditional spirituality. Some Pentecostals pray anyhow, sometimes pocketing their hands without qualms. They seem not to accord God some reverence for his

almightiness and awesomeness. This is seen especially among the Charismatics in the mainline churches. Some of their sisters pray with head open with the argument that their hairs are made for the covering of their heads. In some mainline churches, some “Pentecostalized” youths pray with their eyes opened while some pocket their hands when praying which is not very healthy.

Materialism and Clerical Flamboyancy

Pentecostals’ flamboyant lifestyle is not only enticing to the pastors in the mainline churches, but to the laity too. According to Ukpong (2010), the material success of some Pentecostal ministers has created a kind of “ministerial jealousy” in Nigeria. Some pastors in the mainline churches tend to copy Pentecostals’ lifestyles thereby living lives above their means. Some placed serious financial burden on their churches. Some pastors in the mainline churches are beginning to over emphasize tithing, seed sowing, first fruits and other offertory probably to augment what the Church pays them.

Holier-Than-Thou Attitude

It is observed that one of the greatest harm Pentecostalism has probably done to Nigerians is the disunity it has caused. The behaviours of some of the Charismatics seem to have undermined Christian unity and promote division among Christians, even within the same family. It is seen that the undue “holier-than -thou” attitude of some Charismatics is capable of turning “brother against brother”, “Sister against sister “, and “neighbor against neighbor”. This kind of behaviour is unhealthy and can easily foment conflicts and division in Christendom.

Adoption of Worldly Standard

The Classical Pentecostals are well known for their strict teaching on adornment. They are easily identified through their dressings. Even some neopentecostals like the Deeper Life Bible Church (The Deeper Life) have strict dressing codes. Contrary to this, some other neopentecostals seem to have derailed in Pentecostal’s dressing codes. Most of them particularly the Believer’s Love World (Christ Embassy), the Living Faith Church (the Winners Chapel) among others seems to have relaxed Pentecostal’s rigidity in dressing probably to woo more members to their fold. Most neopentecostals dress carelessly with even some of their men plaiting their hair or going for jerry curl. For instance, Chris Okotie of the Household of God Church, Lagos.

Reactions to Pentecostalism in the Mainline Churches

Change is the only thing that remains permanent across the globe. According to Ebelle (1997), “Change is powerful and is always bound to come. It is as sure as life. Nothing can resist or thwart it, and no status quo is immutable to change” (p.113). Pentecostalism though, is not a recent phenomenon but it seems to be new in the mainline churches. Its appearance in the mainstream protestant churches raises lots of dust among the people. This is because as Frahm and Frahm (1995) puts it “It is part of human nature to get set in our ways, becoming resistant to new ideas, new truths, and change” (p.14).

When Pentecostalism first came to Nigeria it probably introduced a new culture and ideology somehow different from the early missionaries’ ideologies. Mainline Christians first imbibed the culture of the white missionaries who planted Christianity in Nigeria and had settled down long with it before the emergence of Pentecostalism. When Pentecostalism showed up, it seems that its ideologies contradict and disrupt the already existing theology of the missionary Christianity. Sure, it met with stiff resistance as older Christians sharply repudiated the encroachment of Pentecostalism into the mainstream protestant churches. But sooner or later, Pentecostal lifestyles crept into these churches through the efforts of the Charismatic movements. Although, most mainline churches initially seem to repudiate the intrusion of Pentecostalism

into their midst but it gradually finds reception among the people.

CONCLUSIONS

The emergence of Pentecostalism in the mainline churches is not accidental. God seems to have been the architect of Pentecostalism. In his economy, God supernaturally cause the phenomenon to emerge at the time it did and spread uncontrollably everywhere. There is no doubt that Pentecostalism has broken many grounds already in Nigeria. With particular reference to the mainstream protestant churches in Nigeria, the impacts of Pentecostalism are so overwhelming that almost every youth is becoming a Pentecostal. Most of the mainline churches especially are beginning to understand spirituality in the manner the Pentecostals do.

This paper has established that were it not for the resurgence of Pentecostalism in reawakening the degenerating interest of people religious lives, Christianity in Nigeria would have been reduced to mere rituals and legalism. It is discovered that the fire and dynamism which Pentecostalism rekindled in Christendom has significantly goes a long way in strengthening the individual Christians as well as the Church as an institution. There is still much to be expected of in Pentecostalism if only the phenomenon is carefully and fully studied and its principle faithfully applied. The eruption of Pentecostalism should be seen firstly as part of God's gradual revelations for the time and secondly as a mark of advancement of Christianity in the 21st century. The paper submits that it is high time the critics of Pentecostalism stopped sitting on the fence and began to study the essence, efficacy and workability of Pentecostalism to start enjoying its maximum benefit.

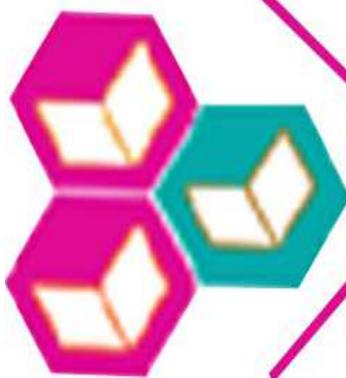
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